THE FARMER'S TROUBLE

Secretary of Agriculture Wilson Diagnoses the Cass.

Says They Do Not Raise the Things the People Want—Recent Observations in the South.

[Copyright, 1897.]

"One trouble with the American farmer is that he will raise what he thinks people ought to want, and not what they do want."

That is the answer of Secretary James Wilson to the question: "What is the matter with agriculture?"

The secretary of agriculture ought to know what is the matter with it if anyone does.

I found the secretary in his office when I called at the department a few days ago. His confidential clerk sat opposite him at his big, flat-topped desk, and two or three of his bureau chiefs came in and waited for a word with him while he was telling me what ailed the farmer.

"Take my own state, Iowa, for example," said the secretary. "We have been raising there a little, wiry horse of 1,200 pounds or thereabuts under the impression that it was wanted. Now we find that people want a draft horse of about 1,600 pounds, and they will pay a good price for it. They want a stylish carriage horse, or a good riding horse, or a horse for army use.

"It is true, also, in a great many cases, that the American farmer does not know the best use to make of his products. My state raises one-seventh of the total corn crop of this country. To-day the cribs are full, and the best price the farmer can get for his corn is 15 cents a bushel. Not long ago I tried an experiment. I got a flock of range lambs and fed them on corn. I did not carry the experiment far enough to get exact results, but I proved that for the corn fed to those lambs I was getting 40 or 50 cents a bushel. The farmer who sells his corn at 15 cents a bushel can dress in rags, let his hair grow long, and yell over hard times; but the farmer who gets a return of 50 cents a bushel for his corn can slap his thigh and be merry over the return of prosperity." And the secretary slapped his thigh vigorously to illustrate and emphasize his remark.

SECRETARY WILSON.
(From His Latest and Best Photograph.)

"An Iowa farmer," he continued, "fed corn to his cows. He found that they ate five cents worth a day and yielded 15 cents in milk. A farmer who gets that return can grow rich."

Mr. Wilson went south with the president in his recent trip; he found two things that interested him, he says. One was that the women of the south have accepted the result of the war; at least, those whom Mr. Wilson met had stopped fighting and laid down their arms.

"Another thing that interested me," he said, "was the condition of the soil. It is a very shallow soil, and they have been planting the same crop in it year after year until every bit of organic matter has gone out of it; the soil is all worn out. We went to Belle Mead farm, where Gen. Jackson is raising blooded stock. He has ten or 12 fine stallions and 100 brood mares; but he has found that the business is not profitable. People would not pay the prices he wanted; so he has put a herd of 50 cows on the farm and gone into dairy work. That interested me. I think the people of the south ought to plant grasses and take to grazing. They should put five-sixths of their land into grass, and the other sixth into something else. By changing around from year to year they could soon restore their soil to its own fertility. They have the finest grazing country in the United States except the northwest; and they have this advantage over the northwest—they can graze all the year round."

I asked Mr. Wilson if he thought the farmers were profiting by their lessons in scientific agriculture.

"They are learing all the time," he said. "The experiment stations are doing splendid work. The bulletins of this department are being distributed very widely."

"And are the people reading them?"

"They are. A farmer's meeting today is very different from what it was a few years ago. The farmer to-day would not listen to the talk he used to hear. The doctor and the preacher used to be asked to speak sometimes, and they would make humorous remarks. Nowadays the farmer would not stand that a minute. The talk you hear at his meetings now is all practical. Farming has become a science. Take dairying for example. It is as different from the old dairying as the transportation of to-day is from that of 100 years ago. The farmer's wife used to throw away one-third of the butter fat in her milk. To-day the separator saves every bit of it. We make in this country to-day the finest butter and cheese in the world. England makes nothing like it. Unfortunately we have been sending abroad oleomargarine — the stuff they rub into a sheep's wool to keep the rain out; and we have sent cheeses which were filled with cotton seed oil. The Englishman has got his idea of our dairy products from these, and he does not want them. I am trying to find a market abroad for our best cheeses and butter, and I am trying to have the restrictions removed from our meat products.

There have been so many gibes at the agricultural department that I asked the secretary if he believed it had really done any good in the few years of its existence.

"Did you ever eat a navel orange?" he said in reply. "The parent tree is here. It was brought from Brazil and cuttings from it were distributed over the country by the department. Sorghum was introduced into the United States by the department of agriculture. The department brought the first beet seed here for experimental culture; and it has pursued its experiments with beets, until now there is no doubt in the minds of the farmers of the United States that we can grow our own supply. The $100,000,000 our people pay for sugar every year is the purse hung up for them, for which they are striving. Some of the experiments with the beet have been discouraging because the conditions were not favorable. The sugar beet requires 10,000 units of heat for its successful cultivation. Climate and soil must be chosen with care.

"Another thing this department is doing is to investigate the experiments which have been going on in the south for the cultivation of tea. I have a letter here now from the man who has been conducting the tea farm about his work and how he has taught the little colored children to pick the leaves. He is getting better tea there than we can get from Ceylon or Formosa. I am having an investigation made to ascertain the isotherm on which he is working, so that we can calculate how much of the territory of the United States is adapted to the cultivation of tea.

"Another thing we have done is to undertake the investigation of the forestry question. Not long ago this department sent to the senate a report on coniferous trees, showing the destruction of our forests. Pine is growing scarcer every year, you know, so that it has become almost as costly as black walnut. The time will come when it will be too expensive for general use; indeed, they are talking already about building cars of steel. What interests us just now, though, more than the destruction of the pine, is the planting of trees in the more arid region. I have a man in Asia making investigations of the subject.

"These are only some of the things we have begun to do. This department has more than 30 divisions. Their work is all important. I have not had time yet to become well acquainted with more than three or four of the divisions.

"But as to the value of the agricultural department's work, it is spreading all the time. Example is more effective than precept. Most men are going to keep on in the way of their fathers and their grandfathers until they look over the fence and see their neighbors doing something different."

GEORGE GRANTHAM BAIN.

HORSES ARE EXPENSIVE.

If You Long to Start a Racing Stable—Well, Don't.

That Is, Unless You Are a Multi-Millionaire — Startling Figures by an Expert.

[Copyright, 1897.]

If you feel a craving, as so many men and women of all times and countries have, to own a racing stable—either to gratify your love for the sport of kings, or because you hope to enter society by way of the turf and the paddock, or because you have visions of wonderful coups and fabulous returns and look upon your prospective stable as a legitimate investment—it will be wise for you to ponder, to do a lot of addition and a very little subtraction before you choose your racing colors. The adding will be of the expense items, and will take you as long as you own your stable; the subtraction will be your earnings from your expenses, and you may not have to do it more than once or twice in your racing career.

It will cost you more to educate one horse for a turf classic than it will to educate your son in all the classics of a university course; moreover, your horse is much less likely to repay you for his education.

Unless your boy acquires that collegiate habit of changing his raiment four times a day, his tailor's bill will be less than your horse's tailor bill, and unless he is a sheer idiot his tutor's bill will be less by many dollars than the bill of your horse trainer's understudy.

Only Glory in It.

Unless you are a Belmont, a Lorillard or a Keene, and intend to race your stable purely for the glory there is in it, or unless you are as shrewd as a Dwyer, a Pittsburgh Phil or a "Pa" Bill Daly and are going to make your living from the turf, a racing stable is one of the finest investments to leave alone which can be found in the country.

Somebody not long ago asked Pittsburgh Phil, the keenest turfman of them all, what he thought of racing as a business venture, and he replied that it was the worst that possibly could be made. "Looking at it from a financial point of view, there is nothing to hope for. You may have large winnings for a year, or five years, or ten, but you never heard of an out-and-out turfman who depended upon the sport for his income who died rich, or even moderately well off.

"Racing is the toughest game ever devised by man. You must give every moment of your time to it; you must measure your brains against the cunningest and craftiest minds in the country. You must follow every movement of your horses, nurse and pamper them as you would a baby, and then, after you have studied it all out until your brain reels and your hair turns gray, the chances are so much against you that not one man in a thousand can win.

"Now and then a man with peculiar aptitude and knowledge of the game wins, but the geniuses of the turf are fewer and further between than in any other walk of life."

Counting the Cost.

A few days ago the writer asked a veteran turfman—a man who has had an intimate knowledge of all the ins and outs of the game for years, and who now owns a stable of his own—to give him in detail the expenses of maintaining a moderate racing stable for a year.

"Don't want any crackajacks—no Hastings or Requitals or Henry of Navarres in your stable?" asked the turfman.

"No crackajacks, Navarres or Requitals."

"Well, then, suppose that we begin with a string of 12 horses—fairly good, honest racers, with a promise of landing some stakes before the season is over. Your original capital will be $75,000; that is the lowest possible sum for which 12 horses such as you want can be bought. You will see how low this estimate is when I tell you that in one year August Belmont paid $92,000 for four horses. Henry of Navarre cost him $27,000; Hastings cost him $37,500; Keenan, $18,000, and Dorian, $10,000. In that same year W. P. Thompson paid $26,000 for Requital.

Such Prices for Trainers.

"Having bought your horses, your next big item will be your trainer. At the least you will have to pay him an annual salary of $5,000, and provide home and board for himself and family the year round. A man who can command a salary of $5,000 will want to live on the best that the land affords, and in figuring $2,500 more for his living expenses you are not overestimating it. Besides this you must pay your trainer a certain percentage of the net earnings of your stable. The four or five really first-class trainers in the country to-day receive a salary of from $8,000 to $20,000, and get from five to ten per cent. of the earnings of their stables. Take John Hyland, for example; he received from Gideon & Daly, in 1895, $10,000 and ten per cent. of the winnings. In 1896 August Belmont engaged him, and the inference is that he now receives a materially larger sum.

Jockey Wants a King's Ransom.

"Your next important item will be your jockey. No rider whose skill is such that you dare intrust your horses to him in a stake event can be had for a retainer of one cent less than $7,500 for the season, which, according to the usual contract, lasts from March 1 until December 1. In addition to this retainer, you must pay your jockey a fee of $25 for every winning mount he rides for you and ten dollars for every losing mount. Then there is your jockey's board bill to settle. Nine out of ten trainers insist that the rider shall live in the stable's training quarters. But we will include that under a separate head later. The giving of presents, too, is just about as imperative now as tipping a porter or a waiter.

Elder Belmont's Generosity.

"It has become an established custom, and the jockeys expect it; you must give to get the best work out of them. August Belmont, Sr., probably was the most lavish of all the turfmen with his gifts this country has ever seen. When old Raceland won the Suburban for him, he almost plastered James Rowe, his trainer, and 'Snapper' Garrison, his jockey, with diamonds. Then he gave a turf dinner at Delmonico's, and with it more diamonds. Another case was when His Highness won the Futurity. Gideon & Daly told McLaughlin and Bergen that the stable had $10,000 to divide between them after the race; and although Merry Monarch ran fourth, Bergen, who had the mount on him, received his half of the $10,000.

Some Recent Retainers.

"By recalling some of the retainers which jockeys have received in the last few years you will see how cheaply you are getting your boy for $7,500. In 1896 August Belmont paid Griffin $17,500, and the year before Gideon & Daly paid him a $16,000 retainer. This year Fred Taral receives from Marcus Daly a retainer of $18,000. 'Tod' Sloane, who is riding for Pittsburgh Phil, gets $15,000. Fred Littlefield's annual retainer from the Morrises is about $10,000, and Thorpe, who is piloting the Bromley string, gets no less than $8,000. It is had to say what the Dwyers pay their jockeys, as they have always been most reticent about it. In the old days, however, the brothers always used to invite McLaughlin and Frank McCabe, their trainer, to dine with them on New Year's day, and when the guests lifted their plates they invariably found a check for $10,000 lying under each. The other day Mike Dwyer declared that his jockey cost him more money than McLaughlin, so it is safe to presume that Willie Sims gets more than $10,000 as a retainer.

"Your second trainer, or foreman, is the next item to consider in your expense account. A thousand dollars a year, with his board and keep, will dispose of him, and he will be the only under-paid man in your establishment. Under practically the same head come the exercise boys. For a stable of 12 horses you will have to pay them $20 a month and board.

The Stable Cuisine.

"This board, mind you, is not the sort of stuff that boys of their class ordinarily would have. Every good stable has its own kitchen, where the men eat. Your chef—and you will have to have one—will buy the best that the market affords, and he will pay race-track prices for it, which are ten per cent. higher than any other prices. Your cook will cost you $50 a month the year round.

"The shoeing of these race horses of yours is another item which will make a cavity in your pocketbook. You will have to buy different plates for them for different kinds of weather. On a fast, dry track one kind of a plate will be needed, and for heavy going another kind will be required. No owner is going to run the chance of losing a race in order to economize in his shoeing bill; and although this expense necessarily varies according to the number of times your horses are started, it is fair to say that $800 a year will not more than cover it.

"The keep of your horses will amount to about eight dollars a day—which does not include a stall rental of about four dollars a month for each animal.

Saddles No Mean Item.

"No saddle can be bought now for less than $35, and you will have to have martingales and different sets of bits for beasts with sore or hard mouths and special saddles to fit the backs of special horses. And then there will be the bill for the clothing—a winter suit for outside work, which will cost you $40; a winter suit for the stable, which will cost another $40; a rubber suit for wet weather at $20; and the boots and bandages will amount to about ten dollars for each horse. Eight hundred dollars will not more than pay your saddlery bill.

Doctor's Bill.

"The veterinary surgeon will come higher than your family doctor. In warm weather your horse will eat well, work well, and yet go to pieces after a race. Then the surgeon will be called in, and he will charge just as much as your own doctor does. At any moment your horses are likely to go sore or contract a splint, and then firing must be performed, and the veterinary sends in his bill for that. The lotions—witch hazel, skunk oil, arnica, and other liniments—all cost money; and if you get off with less than a thousand-dollar doctor bill you may consider yourself lucky.

"Probably you have not considered it, but starting your horses is going to count up before the racing season is over. The cost varies all the way from ten dollars for an overnight event, to $500 for the Realization or Futurity. Every time a horse starts and does not win the lowest possible expense is $20; ten dollars for entrance and ten dollars for the jockey's fee. There is also a small fee for registering your colors.

"The colors themselves will cost you $100 a set; and with your proposed stable you will need three sets. They are of woven silk, and have to be manufactured to order.

"Transportation, too, is costly, especially if you race your horses on tracks far apart from one another. The animals must all be sent by express, as there is too much risk of their taking cold and 'going wrong' when shipped by freight.

"Why, I could sit here and pile up the expense account all night; but the items I have mentioned are the principal ones. Of course, the winnings of certain stables more than offset this, but those stables are few and far between."

JAMES H. TUCKERMAN.